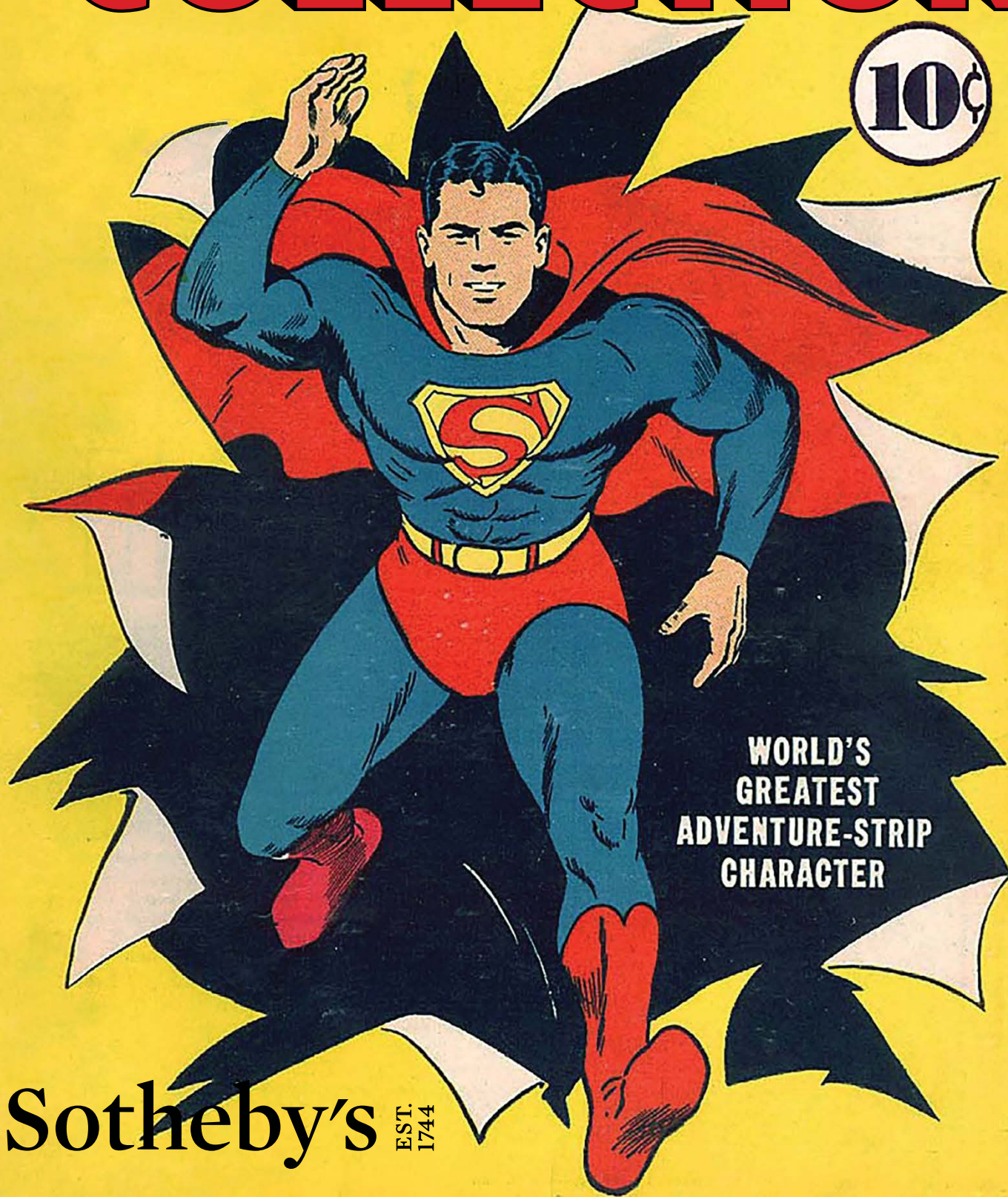


COMPLETE  
**DC**

A PRIVATE SALE OFFERING

# ***THE IAN LEVINE*** **COLLECTION**

10¢



WORLD'S  
GREATEST  
ADVENTURE-STRIP  
CHARACTER

Sotheby's EST. 1744



Sammy Sorber



CUT OUT AND FRAME

COMPLETE  
**DC** *THE IAN LEVINE*  
**COLLECTION**

**A PRIVATE SALE OFFERING**

EVERY COMIC BOOK PUBLISHED  
BY DC FROM 1935–2016

INCLUDING COMPLETE RUNS OF  
ACTION COMICS  
DETECTIVE COMICS  
SUPERMAN  
BATMAN

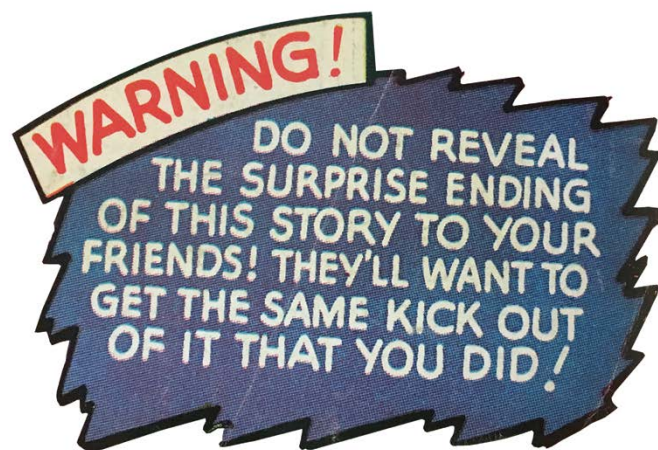
Sotheby's EST. 1744



**Jazz music is often described as America's only true original art form. But jazz should be joined by superhero comic books,**

which, remarkably, achieved an apotheosis with their very first creation: Jerry Siegel and Joe Schuster's Superman. When Superman debuted in *Action Comics* #1, June 1938, DC's predecessor firm, National Allied Publications, had been in business for four years and publishing comics for three—starting in February 1935 with *New Fun: The Big Comic Magazine* #1, an anthology of mostly previously published material in a format nearly twice the size of a standard comic.

But the early, and not so distant, history of DC was made the equivalent of the Stone Age when Jor-El placed his infant son in a spaceship headed to Earth as their home planet of Krypton was exploding. *Action Comics* #1 featured ten other features and strips in addition to “Superman” (“Zatara Master Magician” and “Scoop Scanlan the Five Star



Reporter” among them), so it wasn't immediately clear to National executives why the new title sold out of its first run of 200,000 copies so quickly. But as fans began to clamor for further adventures of Superman, the publisher realized it had a special property on its hands.

Superman was soon joined by another superhero, radically different than the alien man of steel, but just as compelling for readers: Bob Kane's Batman (originally, the Bat-Man), who first appeared in *Detective Comics* #27, May 1939. National Allied Publications soon adopted the initials of this popular title for the company brand that is still recognized the world over: DC.

These two seminal figures soon were joined by a host of other celebrated superheroes, including Wonder Woman, Aquaman, Green Lantern, the Flash, Martian Manhunter, Plastic Man, Green Arrow, Hawkman, Swamp Thing, Black Canary, and Cyborg. These characters and many others also formed such superhero teams as the Justice League of America and the Teen Titans, and individually

Left: *Detective Comics* No. 27, the first appearance of Batman, May, 1939

Right: *New Fun: The Big Comic Magazine* No. 1, February 1935





**"THE COLLECTION SPANS THE EIGHT DECADES WHEN  
COMIC BOOKS DEVELOPED FROM EPHEMERAL  
ENTERTAINMENT FOR CHILDREN TO ONE OF THE  
FOREMOST STIMULI OF GLOBAL POPULAR CULTURE"**

or communally they monthly faced such villains as Lex Luthor, the Joker, Two Face, the Penguin, General Zod, the Riddler, Bizarro, Penguin, Poison Ivy, Sinestro, Catwoman, and Darkseid in a growing variety of comic book titles that created a virtual twentieth-century mythology.

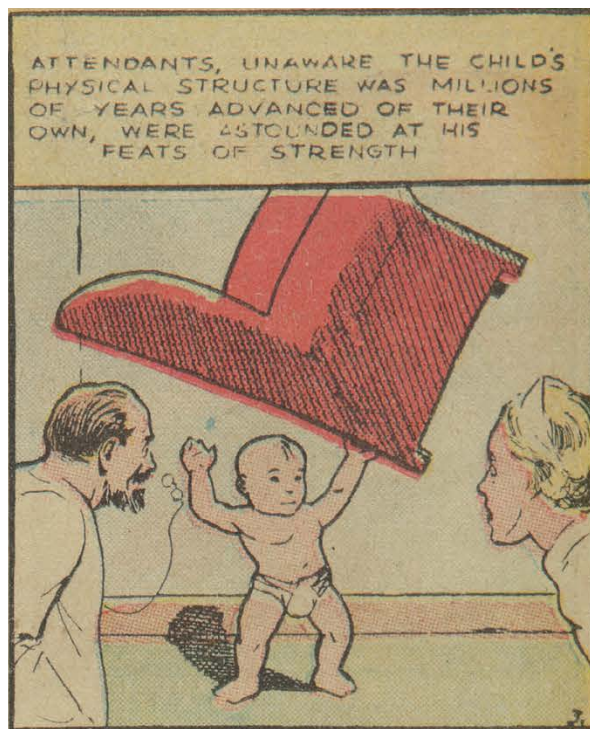
A full roster of significant DC superhero comics characters would number several hundred. But the first—the most significant and most influential—comic book superheroes remain Superman and Batman. *Action Comics* #1, *Detective Comics* #27, *Superman* #1 (June 1939), and *Batman* #1 (Spring 1940) represent the pinnacle of the Golden Age of comics (1938–1955), but while they might be the most valuable books published by DC, they tell only a small portion of the history of DC.

The full story of DC comics can be found—and it is perhaps not an exaggeration to say that the full story can *only* be found—in the Ian Levine Collection, the result of a half-century's obsessive collecting by a person who is himself a significant figure in modern pop culture: a DJ and producer, earlier populariser of Northern Soul, one of the originators of Hi-NRG music, and a fan and significant collector of the BBC series *Doctor Who*.

Levine's introduction to DC came through *The Justice League of America*, which he began reading as an eight-year-old in 1960, during the early years of the Silver Age (1955–1970). Levine remained more a reader than a collector until he discovered the London comic shop Dark They Were and Golden Eyed in 1972. There he realized it was possible to find long-out-of-print issues and even discontinued titles, like *The Justice Society of America*, a Golden Age forerunner of his beloved *Justice League*.

Ian expanded his network of dealers and a few years later he obtained *Detective Comics* #37,

an early Batman issue only ten numbers after the Caped Crusader's first appearance. For a decade, Levine purchased a copy of every new DC issue he could find, while trying to fill in earlier issues from his favorites: *Justice League*, *Detective Comics*, *Action Comics*, *Flash*, *The Brave and the Bold*, and *Green Lantern*. But in pre-internet 1987, Levine despaired of ever finding the many Golden Age comics he lacked, despite having filled a spare room in his home floor to ceiling with DC publications. So he decided to sell many of his best issues—though not *The Justice League*!—to fund his collecting of Northern Soul records and *Doctor Who* film prints.



But DC wasn't through with Ian Levine. He realized that going through his shelves and stacks of comic books with the purchaser had reawakened his passion for this pop art form. In short order, Levine bought his comics back from the dealer he had sold them to—at a 50% premium. He then decided on a step that would make his collection paramount and unique: figuring that he owned about half of all the comics DC had ever published, Levine determined to form a fully complete collection. He pursued this goal single-mindedly for five years, even sacrificing his incomparable collection of Northern Soul records

Opposite: Detail *Action Comics* No. 1, the first appearance of Superman, June, 1939

Top left: *All-American Comics* No. 16, July, 1940

Top right: *Action Comics* No. 13, June, 1939

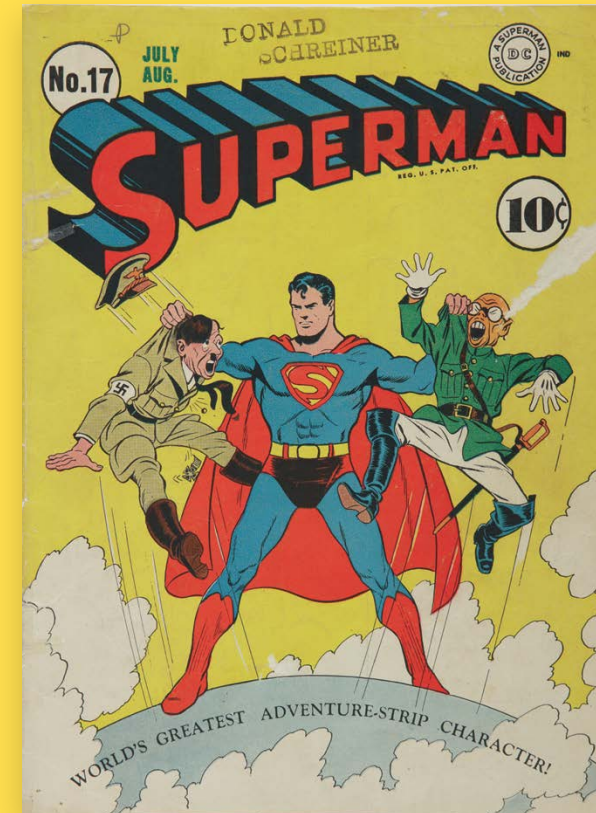
Bottom: *Flash Comics* No. 1, January, 1940



and 132 original *Doctor Who* film prints to support the cause. With the assistance of the nascent internet (including the discussion forums of Certified Guaranty Comic, a comic book grading service) and the dealer/advisor Paul Sassienie, he achieved that ambition, which would essentially be impossible to replicate. Ian continued to add new publications to the collection for a decade after at last obtaining his final lacuna, *New Adventure Comics* #27 from June 1938.

The Ian Levine Collection of DC Comics Complete numbers comfortably more than 40,000 individual issues, comprising *every single comic book published for sale by DC from New Fun #1 in 1935 through the end of 2016*. These comics are supplemented in the Levine Collection by hundreds of promotional comics—many of the utmost rarity—by DC artists and writers and featuring various DC (or DC-inspired) characters endorsing various consumer goods and corporate entities. The collection also features a number of “ashcan” issues (intended to establish copyright but not available for sale), as well as many

foreign (that is, non-United States) reprints, British comic books featuring appearances by DC characters, and a great number of anthology reprints in proper book form. The supremacy of Levine’s achievement was cemented in 2010 when his collection was utilized to supply nearly all of the illustrations for Taschen’s monumental publication *75 Years of DC Comics: The Art of Modern Mythmaking* by Paul Levitz, the former president and publisher of DC.



Superheroes are predominant in the Levine Collection, but all of the various comic genres published by DC are included, which gives a much fuller sense of the influence of comics on popular culture, as well as the range of readers attracted to comics: humor, parody, romance, western, crime, science fiction, fantasy, action and adventure, sword-and-sorcery, military, and adaptations of classic and popular works of literature and film.

The collection spans the eight decades when comic books developed from ephemeral entertainment for children to one of the foremost stimuli of global popular culture, from film and TV to fashion. In the collection, one can trace the trajectory of comics from the target of a congressional investigation of their corrupting influence to the topic of doctoral dissertations addressing issues like war propaganda, environmentalism, and gender identity.

But ultimately, comic books are stories, and that accounts for their enduring appeal. Ian Levine didn’t begin by *collecting* DC comics;



Top left: The Adventures of Bob Hope, February/March, 1950.

Bottom left: Showcase No. 17, 1958

Opposite above: Superman No. 17, July/August 1942

Opposite bottom left: House of Mystery No.1, December/January 1951.

Opposite bottom right: Detail House of Mystery No.1, December/January 1951





he began by reading DC comics. The work of successive generations of the greatest comic book artists and writers are preserved in the collection, from pioneers like Siegel, Schuster, Kane, Joe Simon, Jack “King” Kirby, and Will Eisner; to those who maintained the quality and passion of the books through the Silver Age like C. C. Beck, William Moulton Marston, Sheldon Mayer, Jack Cole, Julius Schwartz, Carmine Infantino, Gil Kane, Mort Weisinger, and Steve Ditko; to those who carried on the tradition through the Bronze Age and into the twenty-first century: Neal Adams, Curt Swan, Denny O’Neil, Joe Kubert, Dennis O’Neil, Dick Giordano, Bernie Wrightson, Marv Wolfman, George Pérez, Paul Levitz, José Luis García-Lopéz, Frank Miller, Alan Moore, Neil Gaiman, Karen Berger, Grant Morrison, Bruce Timm, Alex Ross, Jeph Loeb, Tim Sale, Jim Lee, Darwyn Cooke, and Geoff Johns.

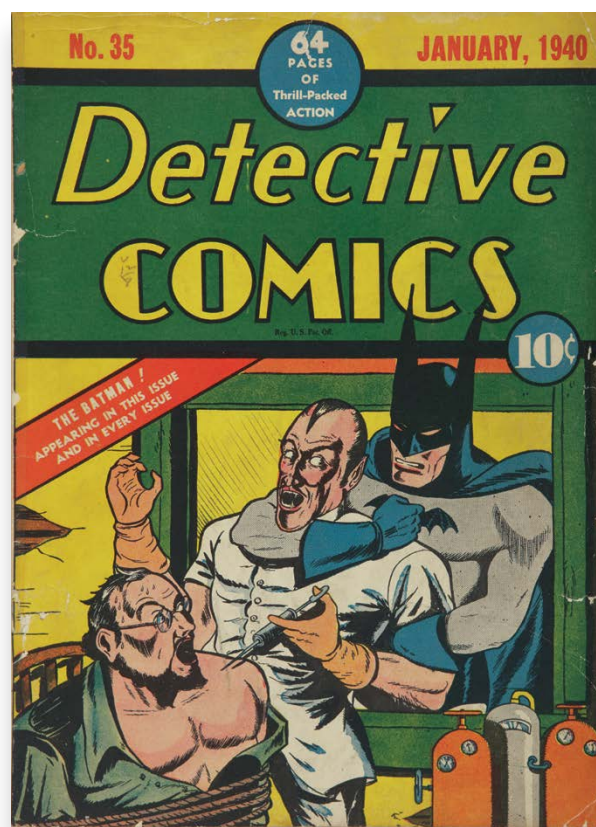
Although he started as a comic book reader, Ian Levine’s engagement with DC aligned closely with the beginning of a more formalized discipline of comic book collecting. Of course, comic books were never meant to last: they were produced with

inexpensive and unstable materials and intended to provide a brief period of entertainment as ephemeral as a daily newspaper or a live and unrecorded radio serial. Back issues, even if readers wanted them, were extremely difficult to locate.

But in 1960, the same year an aunt of eight-year-old Ian Levine treated him to his first issue of *Justice League*, superfans Pat and Dick Lupoff gave away copies of the first issue of their fanzine *Zero* at the World Science Fiction Convention. The ‘zine included a section called “All in Color for a Dime” devoted to comics from the 1940s. Soon after, fanzines exclusively devoted to comics started appearing and gradually a network of enthusiasts formed. Meeting informally to exchange and discuss comics, these fans were no longer children and many sought the comics they had read and discarded years before. DC’s attitude to fans, who were now becoming collectors, was one of bewilderment. The letter column in *Superman* #135 (February 1960) carried the following request and DC’s response:

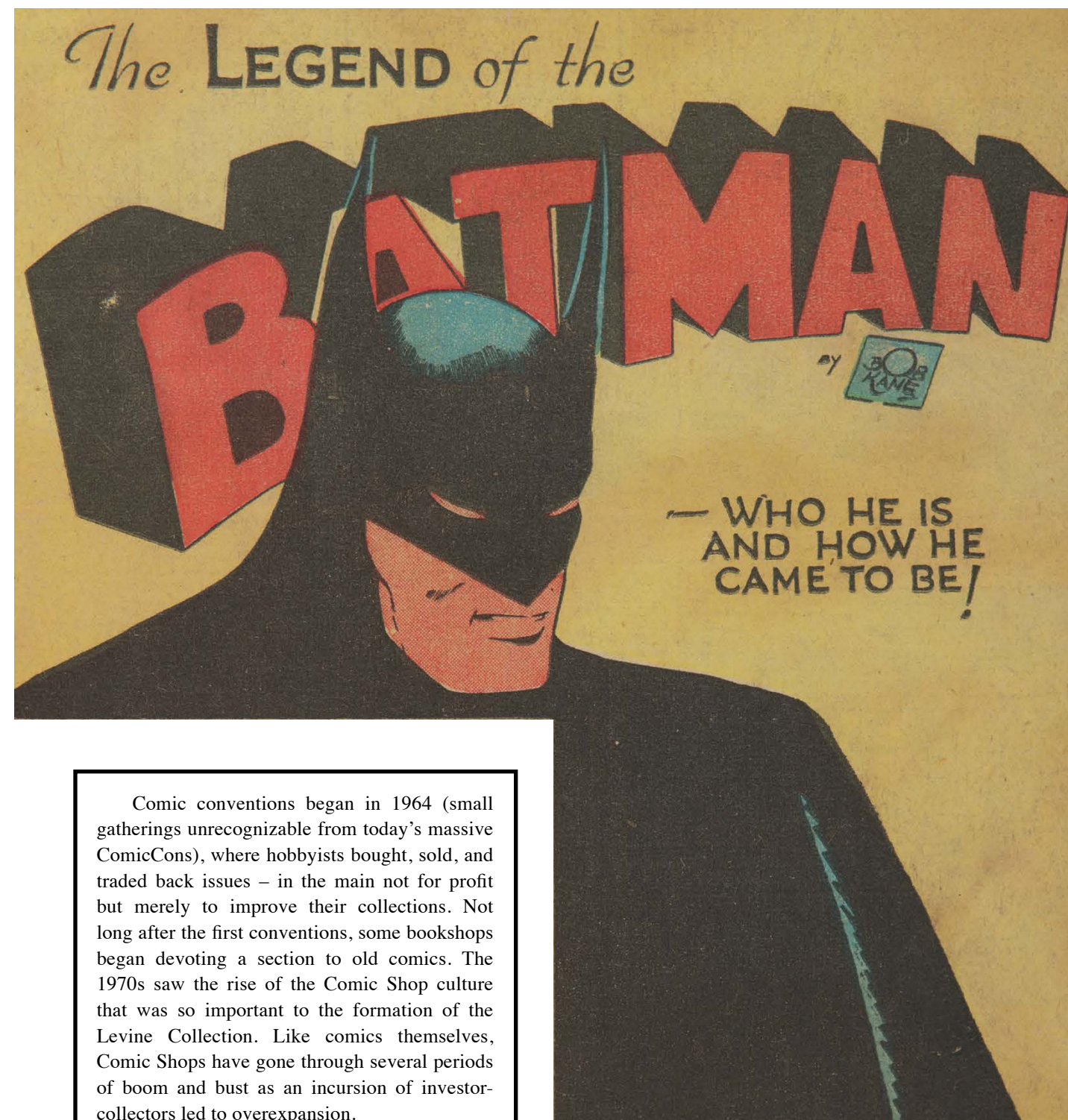
**DEAR EDITOR,  
INSOMUCH AS YOUR OFFICE  
CAN'T SUPPLY BACK-NUMBERS  
OF YOUR VARIOUS SUPERMAN  
MAGAZINES, WOULD IT BE  
POSSIBLE FOR YOU TO PRINT  
MY ADDRESS SO THAT READERS  
WHO HAVE OLD ISSUES CAN  
SWAP OR SELL THEM TO ME?**

**(SORRY, BUT OLD ISSUES  
OF USED MAGAZINES ARE  
KNOWN DISEASE-CARRIERS,  
SO WE CAN'T ENCOURAGE  
SUCH SWAPPING. — ED.)**



Left: Detective Comics No. 35, January, 1940

Above: Detail Batman No. 1, Spring 1940



Comic conventions began in 1964 (small gatherings unrecognizable from today’s massive ComicCons), where hobbyists bought, sold, and traded back issues – in the main not for profit but merely to improve their collections. Not long after the first conventions, some bookshops began devoting a section to old comics. The 1970s saw the rise of the Comic Shop culture that was so important to the formation of the Levine Collection. Like comics themselves, Comic Shops have gone through several periods of boom and bust as an incursion of investor-collectors led to overexpansion.

Investors triggered a number of changes to comic book collecting, including a greatly increased emphasis on condition, which there has been an attempt to codify through supposedly third-party grading. Preservation of a comic’s grade requires that the book be “slabbed”—sandwiched between two sheets of acrylic, inaccessible and unreadable apart from the front and rear covers.





Comprehensiveness, rather than condition, was always Levine’s overarching aim. Despite that, the vast majority of the collection is unrestored and in Very Good or better condition; almost all of the post–Silver Age books are high grade and most of the Modern Age books are Near Mint. The majority of the books with restoration—mostly done by dedicated comics conservators like Susan Cicconi—are from the early years. But a number of the Golden Age comics are also completely unrestored, including the very rare *Big Book of Fun Comics* #1 (Spring 1936). During his collecting Levine has also tried to upgrade his copies of the most significant comics, including *Action* #1. And the fact remains that all of the DC Golden Age comic books are present. As one of Levine’s advisors observed, “There will never be any more Silver and Golden Age comics, just more people wanting them.”

While the procedure of “slabbing” originated in other collecting fields, the objects in those fields (coins, stamps, baseball cards) typically have only two surfaces. For Levine, the practice seemed especially unsuitable for comics, which are, after all *books* of multiple pages. So he has eschewed slabs in his collecting, going so far as to remove them when a comic arrived sealed in plastic. This does not mean that his collection has not been cared for: the comics have been tightly shelved, mostly in individual acid-free comic bags, and housed in a climate-controlled environment.

But because of this, the Levine Collection is alive, and its individual comics are as engaging and inviting as they were when they first hit a rotating comic book stand. The full books can be seen and appreciated: not just the covers, but the full stories, including the often dramatic first-page splashes



with the credits of those involved, including the letterer and inker; the editorial materials, including letters from readers and prose short stories that were often included in Golden Age comics; and the riot of advertisements that themselves form an important visual history of American material culture.

One simple way of quantifying the benefits of an unslabbed collection of this type is to count the number of images that can be enjoyed, studied, and displayed. 40,000 slabbed comic books reveal over 80,000 images: the front and back covers only. Allowing for an average length of forty pages, those same 40,000 comics, when opened for careful perusal, would have approximately 1,600,000 individual pages available for viewing. And those individual pages are the entryway into the DC Universe, one of the most important and enduring creations of American popular art and culture.

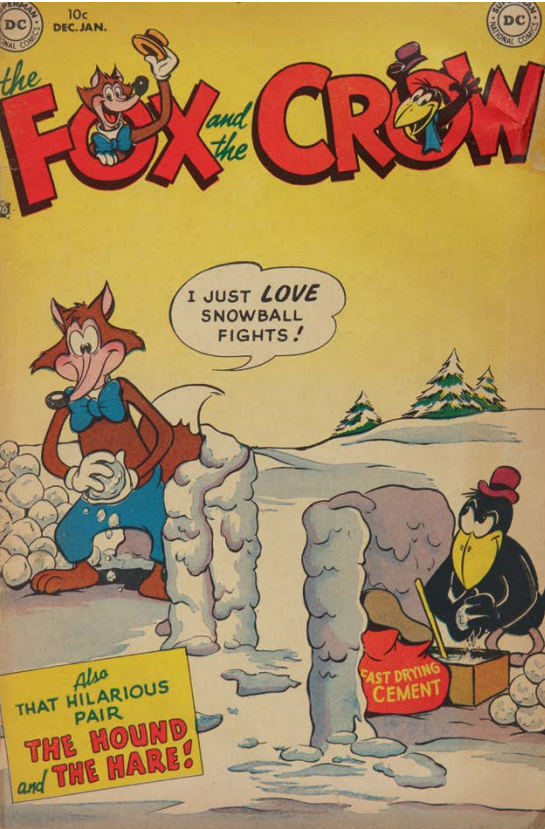


Left: A pair of typical Golden Age comic Christmas advertisements

Opposite above: Superman No. 76, May/June, 1952.

Opposite bottom left: All Star Comics No. 3, Winter 1940

Opposite bottom right: The Fox and the Crow No. 1, December/January 1951







WINTER ISSUE  
**SUPERMAN**  
10c

No. 1 WINTER ISSUE  
**ALL FUNNY COMICS**  
12 BIG LAUGHING  
OLD FRIENDS AND NEW  
IN BRAND-NEW STORIES

APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY

GEE, OXIE, I SHOULDN'T BE GOIN' DRIVIN' IT WASTES RUBBER!

BUT I'M GONNA SAVE RUBBER, PENNILESS! -- I'M GONNA DRIVE BACKWARDS!

DOES THAT MAKE SENSE?

BUZZY No. 1 WINTER ISSUE

**SHOWCASE**  
This issue:  
**FIRE FIGHTER**

APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY

DC \$100 PRIZE CONTEST  
100-PAGE SUPER SPECTACULAR  
**LOVE STORIES**

MY SHAMEFUL PAST!  
A FULL-LENGTH NOVELETTE! COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE!  
Made for Love!

MY SISTER STOLE MY MAN!  
SPECIAL! TED LONG OF THE TODAY SHOW TELLS YOU

**B**

I MAY BE RUINING MY LIFE... BUT I CAN'T HELP MYSELF!

APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY

**GREEN LANTERN**  
10c

Featuring  
"MENACE OF THE GIANT PUPPET!"

APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY

**GREEN LANTERN**  
CO-STARRING  
**GREEN ARROW**

STOP! this is the NEW GREEN ARROW

IN BRIGHTEST DAY, IN BLACKEST NIGHT, NO EVIL SHALL ESCAPE MY SIGHT!

NEVER AGAIN!

APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY

**FLASH**  
10c

APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY

BATTLEFIELD ADVENTURE  
**COMBAT**  
OCTOBER 10c

THE FIRES OF HELL  
BEYOND THE CALL OF DUTY

**CHALLENGE OF THE UNKNOWN**  
10c

Featuring  
"The HUMAN PETS!"

OUR YOUNG CAPTOR FROM OUT OF SPACE LEFT THE TOP OFF OF OUR CAGE--AND HIS HOUSEHOLD PET IS GOING FOR US!

APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY

**THE FLASH**  
10c

FLASH! HELP ME!  
I'M COMING!  
I'M COMING!

APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY

NO. 8  
**ALL STAR Comics**  
10c

DEC.-JAN.

APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY

**STRANGE ADVENTURES**  
10c

THRILLING SCIENCE-FICTION TALES!

thrilling preview of Hollywood's smash interplanetary epic--  
"DESTINATION MOON"



# A BRIEF HISTORY OF DC

BY PAUL SASSIENIE

## 1) Inception to 1938

The company commonly referred to as DC has a somewhat complex beginning. Founded by Major Malcolm Wheeler-Nicholson as National Allied Publications, its first comic was the tabloid-sized New Fun: *The Big Comic Magazine* #1 in February 1935. The company's second title, *New Comics* #1 (December 1935), appeared in a size close to what would become the standard during the period now called the Golden Age of Comic Books.

Eventually, circumstances led Wheeler-Nicholson to form a partnership with printer Harry Donenfeld and, eventually, accountant Jack Liebowitz to, in 1937, produce his third title, *Detective Comics*. This partnership was Detective Comics and was the first direct corporate predecessor of today's DC. But by 1938 mounting debts forced Wheeler-Nicholson to sell his share of Detective Comics and then to declare bankruptcy, losing control of his own Nicholson Publishing Co., the final direct successor to National

Allied. Donenfeld, Liebowitz, and Paul Sampliner, Donenfeld's silent partner, promptly bought Nicholson Publishing's two titles at a bankruptcy auction and transferred them over to Detective Comics.

## 2) The Golden Age (1938-1955)

Detective Comics soon launched a fourth title, *Action Comics*, the first issue of which introduced Superman. Editor Vin Sullivan chose to run the feature after Sheldon Mayer rescued it from the slush pile. *Action Comics* #1 (June 1938), the first comic book to feature the new character archetype—soon known as “superheroes”—proved a major sales hit. About 100 copies of *Action Comics* #1 are believed to exist, and only a handful of those are in good condition. The company quickly introduced other superheroes and in May 1939 Batman made his first appearance in *Detective Comics* #27.

(It is worth noting that in February 2014, a copy of *Action Comics* #1, which was originally priced at 10 cents, sold at auction for \$3,200,000, the highest price ever achieved by a comic book. The record auction price for *Detective Comics* #27, for a copy sold in 2010, is a relatively modest \$1,075,000.)

Due to the overwhelming popularity of Superman after his premiere in *Action Comics* #1, National Allied Publications decided to launch an entirely new magazine devoted to that character. This innovation was unprecedented: never before had an entire comic book been devoted to the adventures of a single character. *Superman* #1 was groundbreaking. The alter-ego of Clark Kent now also had the distinction of being the first hero-character featured in more than one comic magazine. By issue #7, Superman was being hailed on the covers as the “World's Greatest

Right: *Action Comics* No. 1, the first appearance of Superman, June, 1938





Adventure Strip Character.”

Following his success in *Detective Comics*, in Spring 1940 Batman also got his own title which saw the first appearances of both the Joker and Catwoman.

In 1939 Max Charles Gaines partnered with Liebowitz to start up All-American Comics, sharing distribution and staff with Donenfeld’s operation. Except for issues cover-dated 1945, All-American books shared the same logos and branding as *Detective Comics* and its corporate siblings. Their first publication was *All-American Comics* #1 (April 1939). All-American’s first superheroes began their run in *Flash Comics* #1 (January 1940). Then, in July 1940 The Green Lantern made his first appearance in *All-American Comics* #16. Green Lantern has proved to be one of DC’s most enduring characters.

During All-American’s existence, much cross-promotion took place between the two editorially independent companies, so much so that the first iteration of the Justice Society of America, in *All Star Comics* #3 (Winter 1940/41), included in its roster the National characters Doctor Fate, Hour-Man, the Spectre, and the Sandman—creating the first intercompany crossover in the comics industry. (National’s Sandman, Spectre, and Hour-Man had previously appeared in solo adventures in *All Star Comics* #1 (Summer 1940).

In a bid to expand the readership of superhero comics beyond the core demographic of young and adolescent boys, in December 1941 the company introduced Wonder Woman in



*All Star Comics* #8 and a month later she featured on the cover of *Sensation Comics* #1. Wonder Woman #1 was published in the summer of 1942. Wonder Woman was created by William Moulton Marston (assisted by his wife), who explained his inspiration this way: “Not even girls want to be girls so long as our feminine archetype lacks force, strength, and power. Not wanting to be girls, they don’t want to be tender, submissive, peace-loving as good women are. Women’s strong qualities have become despised because of their weakness. The obvious remedy is to create a feminine character with all the strength of Superman plus all the allure of a good and beautiful woman.”

During 1945, All-American behaved more as a separate publisher. Also during that year, Gaines published his first title using Educational Comics as the publishing company with an “EC” logo. By the end of the year Gaines sold his share of All-American back to Liebowitz and Donenfeld and went on to build EC—whose most notable publication was *Mad*—into

**Top to Bottom:**

**New Fun: The Big Comic Magazine No. 1, February, 1935**

**New Fun: The Big Comic Magazine No. 3, April 1935**

**New Fun: The Big Comic Magazine No. 4, May, 1935**

**The Big Book of Fun Comics No. 1, November, 1935**

**More Fun: The Big Comic Magazine No. 7, January 1936**

**Opposite: Sensation Comics No. 1, the first appearance of Wonder Woman, January, 1942**







a separate company. Eventually, Donenfeld and Liebowitz consolidated all of their publishing companies, now numbering more than a dozen, including those from All-American, into National Comics Publications.

When the popularity of superheroes faded in the late 1940s, the company focused on such genres as science fiction, westerns, humour, and romance. DC also published crime and horror titles, albeit relatively tame ones, and so DC largely avoided the mid-1950s backlash against such comics. A handful of the most popular superhero titles (most notably *Action Comics* and *Detective Comics*, the medium's two longest-running titles) continued publication.

### 3) The Silver Age (1955-1970)

In the mid-1950s, editorial director Irwin Donenfeld and publisher Liebowitz tasked editor Julius Schwartz (whose roots lay in the science-fiction book market) with producing a one-shot Flash story in the try-out title *Showcase*. Instead of reviving the old character, Schwartz had writers Robert Kanigher and John Broome, penciler Carmine Infantino, and inker Joe Kubert create an entirely new super-speedster, updating and modernizing the Flash's civilian identity, costume, and origin with a science-fiction bent. The Flash's reimagining in *Showcase* #4 (October 1956) proved sufficiently popular that it soon led to a similar revamping of the Green Lantern character, the introduction of the modern all-star team Justice League



of America (JLA), and many more superheroes, heralding what historians and fans call the Silver Age of comic books.

However, several other characters commonly associated with the Silver Age actually predate the Flash in *Showcase* #4. Science-fiction adventurer Captain Comet debuted in 1951 in the pages of *Strange Adventures*, and the Martian Manhunter made his first appearance in 1955 (a full

year before the Flash) in *Detective Comics* #225. Although the Martian Manhunter is technically the first superhero exclusive to Silver Age publishing, comic historians generally give that honor to the Flash.

Some DC Comics enthusiasts believe that the Silver Age didn't end circa 1970 but in fact ended with the 1985/6 crossover maxi-series, *Crisis on Infinite Earths*. *Crisis* yielded not only the end of an

era, but also a universal reboot of the internal history of most of DC's major projects. Many characters and events that are germane to the continuity of Earth-One are said to be part of the Silver Age.

### 4) The Bronze Age (1970-1985/6)

DC Comics' Bronze Age is colloquially used to refer to everything published from 1970 through the conclusion of *Crisis on Infinite Earths*. There is no one single event that can be said to herald the beginning of the Bronze Age. Instead a number of events at the beginning of the 1970s, taken together, can be seen as a shift away from the tone of comics in the previous decade.

One such event was the publication of *Green Lantern/Green Arrow* #85 (October 1971), which was one of the first comic stories to tackle the issue of drug use and featured cover art by Neal Adams. DC began to grow up and deal with real-world issues such as racism, poverty, and drug addiction.

Another significant occurrence was Jack Kirby's departure from Marvel Comics in 1970, ending arguably the most important creative partnership of the Silver Age (with Stan Lee), to rejoin DC, where he created The Fourth World series of titles starting with Superman's Pal *Jimmy Olsen* #133 in December 1970.

Left: An assortment of Golden Age Batman comics

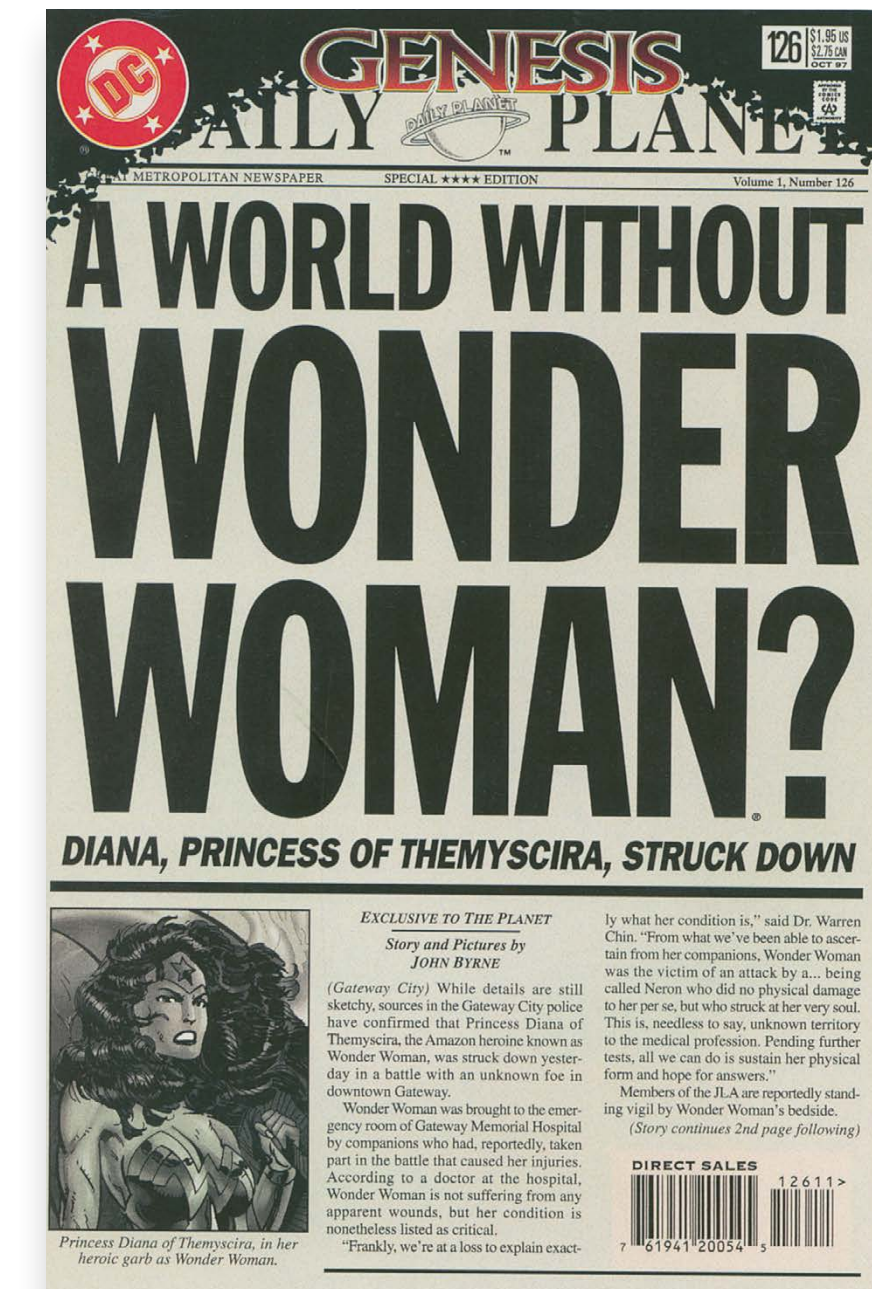
Above: The Brave and the Bold No. 34, March 1955



Also in 1970, Mort Weisinger, the long-term editor of the various Superman titles, retired and was replaced by Julius Schwartz. With the assistance of veteran Superman artist Curt Swan and groundbreaking author Denny O’Neil, Schwartz set about toning down some of the more fanciful aspects of the Weisinger era, removing most Kryptonite from continuity and scaling back Superman’s by-then nigh-infinite powers.

The beginning of the DC Bronze Age coincided with the end of the careers of many of the veteran writers and artists of the time, or their promotion to management positions and retirement from regular writing or drawing, and their replacement with a younger generation of editors and creators, many of whom knew each other from their experiences in comic book fan conventions and publications. At the same time, DC began the era by scaling back on its superhero publications, cancelling many of the weaker-selling titles, and experimenting with other genres such as horror and sword-and-sorcery.

The era also encompassed major changes in the distribution of and the audience for comic books. Over time, the medium shifted from cheap mass-market products sold at newsstands and aimed at young children, to a more expensive product sold at specialty comic book shops and aimed at a smaller, core audience of fans. The shift in distribution allowed many small-print publishers to enter the market, changing the medium from one dominated by a few large publishers, led by DC and Marvel,

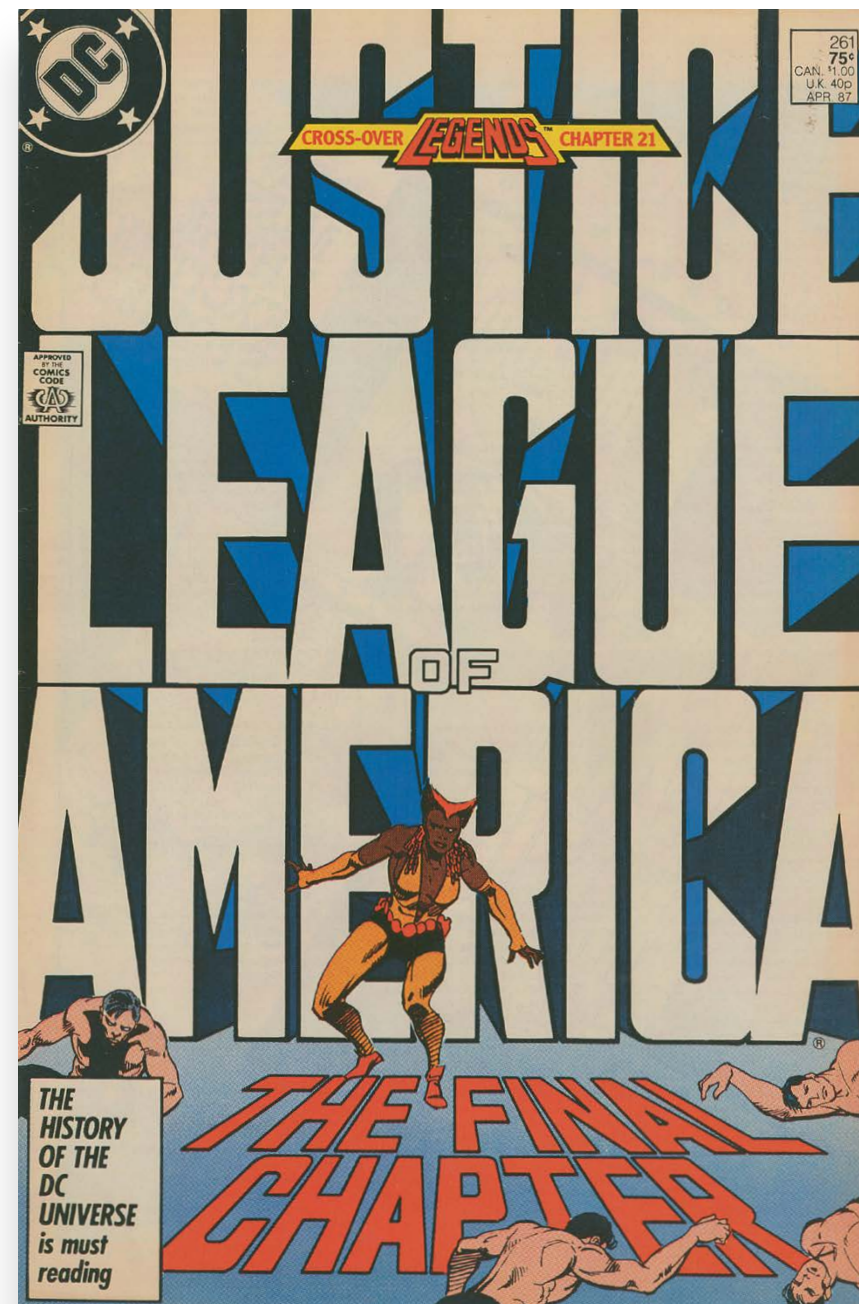


to a more diverse and eclectic range of books.

DC cancelled most of its superhero titles other than those starring Superman and Batman. In their place the company experimented with a wide variety of other genres, including the westerns, horror, and monster stories. These trends peaked in the early 1970s, and the medium

reverted by the mid-1970s to selling predominantly superhero titles.

By this time, DC had launched numerous new titles such as Jack Kirby’s *New Gods* and Steve Ditko’s *Shade the Changing Man*. The company referred to this as the DC Explosion. DC greatly overestimated the appeal of so many new titles at once and it nearly broke the company. DC’s



Left: Wonder Woman Vol. 2, No. 126, January, 1996.

Above: Justice League of America No. 261, April 1987

Bronze Age ended in 1986 when it completed its special twelve-issue event series, *Crisis on Infinite Earths*, which marked the revitalization of the company’s product line and marked DC’s return as a serious challenger to Marvel, which at the time claimed 50% of the market.

## 5) The Modern Age (1985/6–2011)

In 1986, with the publication of the four-issue miniseries *The Dark Knight Returns* by Frank Miller and the revolutionary twelve-issue *Watchmen* series by Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons, DC redefined the superhero genre and inspired years of “grim and gritty” comic books. This heralded the start of the Modern Age.

DC’s line was becoming more “adult” with the publication of groundbreaking titles such as *Hellblazer*, which promised “40 Pages of Sheer Terror” (1988), and Neal Gaiman’s multi-award winning *Sandman* (1989). When, in 1993, DC launched its Vertigo imprint, which was aimed at a late-teen and adult audience, both titles moved there. The Vertigo line often contained graphic violence, substance abuse, frank (but not explicit) depictions of sexuality, profanity, and controversial subjects.

By the mid-1990s writers began to imagine what superheroes might be like in the “real world.” A good example of this is *Kingdom Come*, the four-issue miniseries published in 1996. Written by Alex Ross and Mark Waid and painted in gouache by Ross and set some twenty years into the future of the then-current DC Universe, it deals with the increasing conflict between “traditional” superheroes, such as Superman, Wonder Woman, and the Justice League, and a growing population of largely amoral and dangerously irresponsible new vigilantes. In order not to violate continuity, this was billed as an “Elseworld” story, similar to the “imaginary” stories from the Silver Age.



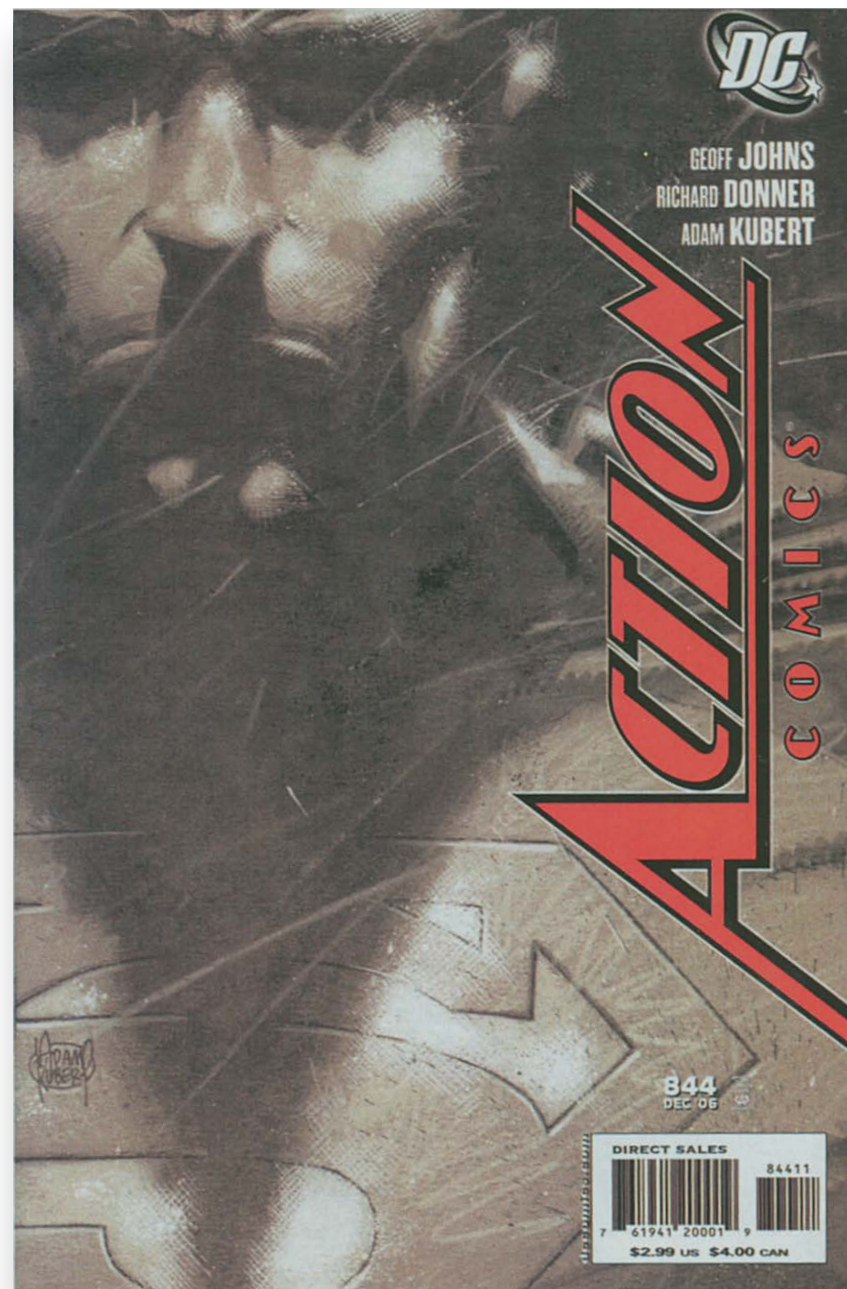
## 6) The New 52 (2011-)

On Wednesday, August 31, 2011, DC Comics launched a historic renumbering of the entire DC Universe line of comic books with 52 first issues. The first of these was *Justice League* #1. This reboot was severely criticized by longtime DC fans (including Ian Levine), with many readers objecting to the discontinuing of consecutive numbering of core-titles such as *Action Comics* and *Detective Comics*. Despite such objections, the bold relaunch was hugely successful for DC, which registered record-breaking sales, with many of the new titles selling out and going to second and third printings within days of publication. In addition to continuing some of their existing titles such as *Superman* and *Batman*, DC also revived a selection of their discontinued titles, including *Swamp Thing* and *Nightwing*, and resurrected some titles from their defunct imprint Wildstorm, such as *Stormwatch* and *Grifter*.

This brief history can be witnessed—and enjoyed—in full in the Ian Levine Collection. A full inventory of the Collection, graded by Paul Sassienie, is available.

NB. Paul Sassienie has been collecting comics since the early 1960s and has been an industry professional since 1988. He is the author of *The Comic Book: The One Essential Guide for Comic Book Fans Everywhere* (Ebury Press, 1994), as well as many articles. He was the resident “comic expert” on

*LBC and Radio London* hosting phone-ins. He has appeared on *Sky News*, BBC 2's *The Money Programme*, Radio 4 and both BBC 1 & 2. He has sat on many panels in the UK and US advising on grading and conservation and studied paper for two years at The London College of Printing. He is a former advisor to both *The Overstreet Price Guide Update* and *The British Comic Book Price Guide*.



Above: Action Comics No. 844, December, 2006.

Opposite: An assortment of Golden Age comics featuring Superman







A Portion of the Levine Collection as stored in his home







Sotheby's EST. 1744  
Collectors gather here.